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THAILAND'S CONNECTION WITH INDIAN NATIONALIST ACTIVITIES

Two documents recently obtained from Thailand throw fresh light on the activities of the Indian nationalists in that country. The Indian Independence League (IIL) and the Indian National Army (INA) were both formally launched in Bangkok under Japanese sponsorship during the regime of the collaborationist Thai Premier, Pibul Songgram. The present Thai government is aware that Thailand can be accused of harboring if not aiding members of Subhas Chandra Bose's army and Azad Hind government as they made preparations to assist the Japanese with their attack on India. It is therefore to the interests of the Thai government to present documentary evidence that the Japanese forced the Thai to give support to the activities of the Indian nationalists, and at the same time to show that the Thai gave as little support as possible.

One of the Thai documents stated to be a copy of a letter from the Counsellor to the Japanese Embassy in Bangkok, Ko Ishii, to the Thai Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Wichit Wichit Wathakan, dated 28 May 1942, is a memorandum based on a personal conference.[1] It states:

> In confirmation of our conversation yesterday I hereby wish to state that the Japanese Government is prepared to support the Indian people to establish "India for Indian People," and in this connection I wish to ask Your Government to work jointly with us in the following ways:
>
> (1) The Thai Government is to co-operate with the Japanese Government with sincere sympathy to help positively the movement of the Indian people in their endeavour to get rid of British fetters and to establish "India for Indian People."
>
> (2) The Thai Government is to give facilities to the political movement of the Indian people to a reasonable extent. As the Indian people desire to open a meeting of the representatives of all Indian people in East Asia in the middle of June [1942] at Bangkok, the Thai Government is to give the necessary permission for such meeting to be held at their request. The Thai Government is

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1 OSS CID XL-10367, 10 May

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further to recognize that the central office of this political movement is to be set in Bangkok and will consequently give facilities of travelling and dwelling to those Indian people connected with the said meeting.

(3) The Thai Government is to give enough protection to the Indian people in their activities in cultural and economic life.

I also wish to assure Your Excellency that this movement will prove harmless to your country, and to that, the Japanese Government will pay its most serious attention to avoid any discrepancies that may have arisen.

Yours very sincerely,

(Signed) KO ISHII

The second document is described as a "statement from official sources in Thailand summarizing Indian activities, requests, and Thai responses."[2] As evidence that the Thai did not willingly further the plans of the Indian agents this document points out that the Thai government refused "to forbid Indians to become naturalized Thai" citizens, as Subhas Chandra Bose requested; that the Thai government refused to allow the Indian Independence League to buy a piece of ground in Cholburi as a site for an INA training school; that the Thai government refused the League's request "that Thai police cooperate with Free Indian MP'S in arresting deserters," the Thai replying that "deserting from an Indian Camp is not against Thai Criminal Law;" and that the Thai government refused the League's request for special consideration in connection with the conversion of 1000-baht notes into bonds.

Reports from other sources confirm the statement made in this document that the League customarily raised funds from the local Indian population by means of demands "setting the minimum which they are expected to give." Failure to comply brought pressure upon the individual "by the League itself or by the Japanese." Indian merchants therefore sought Thai citizenship in order to escape Japanese and Indian MP's.

Members of the Indian National Army were permitted, however, to drill on Thai soil at Cholburi, at a camp near Hua Hin, and elsewhere. Probably most of these soldiers were former POW's brought up from Malaya by the Japanese, inasmuch as the total Indian population of Thailand was less than (estimated) ten thousand and in general showed little martial spirit. It may also be noted that out of League funds, which amounted

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2 CID XL-11789, 15 June

to over seven million baht at one time. Bose made two donations totaling 150,000 baht to the Thai government "in appreciation of the assistance being extended by the government and people of Thailand for the cause of Indian independence."[3]

The Indian Independence League, which got its start in Bangkok a few days after the Japanese invasion, moved its headquarters to Singapore in 1942. When the Provisional National Government of Free India was formed under S.C. Bose (October 1943) it was promptly recognized by Japan, Italy, and the puppet governments of Burma, Occupied China (Nanking), the Philippines, and Manchukuo, but was recognized by the Thai government only after a significant interval of one month (19 November).[4] Bose and his staff moved from Singapore to Rangoon in January 1944. On 25 May 1945 he was forced to leave Rangoon,[5] following Allied military successes in Burma, and passed through Bangkok to Singapore. Domei reports made no mention of welcoming celebrations in Bangkok at that time, and in Domei summaries of Bose's statements made in Singapore early in July no reference was made to plans for further operations of Indian organizations in Thailand. As of 10 July 1945 the number of INA troops with the Japanese forces in Thailand was estimated to be approximately 1,300.[6]

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3 CID XL-10387
4 FEPA, 19 November 1943, p. 6
5 OWI Thailand Intelligence Digest, 7 July
6 Source S, A-59455, 1 August